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ABSTRACT

The rural school teacher needs to be certain that pupils are attaining the skills needed in reading to be successful in the world of work or postsecondary education. A major source of problems for rural pupils is that many lack background information in order to attach meaning to what is being read. Adequate attention must be given to pupils developing necessary skills in meaningful reading of abstract words. To attain usable background information, teachers may use clear pictures that relate to what rural pupils will be reading, followed by a discussion of the illustrations so that the pupils will attach meaning to the content being read. If pupils secure the necessary background information prior to reading subject matter, they will become increasingly proficient in word recognition and identification. From the completed reading activity, the rural school pupil must be able to make use of content acquired. The result of separating facts from opinions, reality from fantasy, and accurate from the inaccurate is critical thinking. Being good readers assists rural school pupils to achieve objectives that are vital for their long-term goals. (RS)

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READING AND THE RURAL SCHOOL PUPIL

1994

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Reading, the first of the three R's, represents a skill that is vital to achieve for all pupils in rural schools. Society is demanding an increasingly higher level of reading achievement of high school graduates than ever before. Thus the elementary school years are vital in having learners achieve relevant skills in the reading curriculum. Many rural school pupils will move to urban areas as an adult to secure a job or vocation. The rural school teacher needs to be certain that pupils are attaining the skills needed in reading to be successful in the world of work or when attending additional years of schooling beyond that of the secondary school. Each pupil must be challenged to achieve as much as possible.

Background Information

I have supervised student teachers for approximately thirty years. Many of my student teachers taught in rural schools. A major source of problems which I observed pertaining to the teaching of reading was that pupils lacked background information in order to attach meaning to what was being read. If we want these pupils to understand subject matter read, the teacher must assist learners to comprehend content they will be reading. Over the years, I have recommended to student teachers that adequate attention must be given to pupils developing necessary skills in meaningful reading of abstract words. Prior to reading a given selection by pupils, the teacher must be reasonably certain that pupils will understand what the diverse abstract symbols stand for in a grapheme-phoneme relationship. To attain usable background information, the teacher may use clear pictures that relate to what rural school pupils will be reading. The illustrations should be discussed with learners so that they in sequence will attach meaning to content being read, silently or orally. It is surprising how much better pupils achieve

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when they have the needed background information to understand the abstract words being read. How much time should be spent on having learners secure the necessary prerequisite information to make reading meaningful? At first with a new set of learners at the beginning of a school year, the teacher will need to estimate the number of sequential activities necessary. Pupils differ from each other in terms of reading skills and abilities possessed. Careful observation by the teacher will, in many cases, indicate the amount of teaching time necessary to guide learners in obtaining an adequate amount of subject matter prior to reading orally or silently. The teacher must secure the attention of each learner when background information is being provided so that readiness for reading is in evidence. Selected teachers prefer to start with concrete objects instead of pictures as a first learning activity in providing background information. A concrete to semiconcrete sequence is then being emphasized. A major problem here may be the locating of concrete objects when pictures are much easier to secure to show to learners prior to reading. Encyclopedias, newspapers and newsmagazines, old textbooks, and teacher collections of pictures over the years, among other reference sources, generally contain numerous useful illustrations to provide background information to pupils prior to reading. I have known student and regular teachers who have collected a good file of illustrations. Each set of illustrations is placed into a manila folder and labeled such as "pictures of farm animals" or more specifically "illustrations on chickens." I would strongly recommend for rural children that they experience pictures on urban scenes prior to reading since their vocabularies may be stronger on concepts pertaining to rural situations. Thus, pupils need to view scenes of escalators, freeways, urban pollution, hotels, car parking garages, and sky scrapers, among others, prior to reading related content from the basal reading series. This is not to say that many rural pupils have not been in and seen urban sites and situations. Rather, the teacher must make certain that rural pupils understand what is being read.

As the individual pictures are being discussed with learners, the teacher needs to print in neat manuscript letters on the chalkboard the

abstract word for each illustration. Learners should view each word carefully and its relationship to the relevant picture being considered. Pupils must be guided to pronounce individual words correctly. Incorrect pronunciation can make for errors in word identification. Here is a good time to teach word recognition skills as is necessary. Thus pupils that have trouble with phonetic elements can be given needed assistance. Or, a pupil who reveals deficiencies in syllabication skills may be given help to identify words correctly. Rural school pupils will show which skills in reading they need more guidance in. The teacher needs to be proficient in diagnosis and remediation. In all cases, I believe that if pupils secure the necessary background information prior to reading subject matter, they will become increasingly proficient in word recognition and identification. Why? Learners then become more capable in using context clues to identify unknown words. For example, if a pupil cannot identify a word in reading, he/she might fill in the unknown with a word that makes sense in context. That word might come from one of the illustrations used to guide pupils to attain background information. If not, skill in using phonics and syllabication will assist the learner in word recognition of the unknown. Deficiencies in reading must be identified and remediation take place so that the rural school pupil will be ready to assume increasing responsibilities in the complexities of life.

From the completed reading activity, the rural school pupil must be able to make use of content acquired. It is salient then that these learners be able to think about ideas attained. From what has been comprehended in reading, the pupil needs to analyze subject matter. To analyze means to break down into component parts that which has been read. Thus separating facts from opinions, reality from fantasy, and the accurate from the inaccurate is important. The result is critical thinking. Thinking of unique ideas pertaining to what has been read is also significant. Here, the rural school pupil engages in creative thought. Originality of interpretation and novelty of ideas expressed directly related to what has been read further stresses creative thinking. A very salient skill for all rural school pupils to achieve is to read to

solve problems. All face problems in society and need to select and solve relevant problems be they personal or social dilemmas. The rural school pupil of today will need to solve many problems, including whether to go on to higher education or into the world of work after high school graduation; which job, profession, or vocation to pursue; and how to finance the getting of needed education to pursue what is desired in the work place. Being a good reader assists the rural school pupil to achieve objectives that are vital for his/her long term goals. Also, being a good reader has intrinsic values for personal enrichment, recreation, leisure time activities, and individual enhancement. Of all skills I possess, reading would almost have to come near the top in terms of value in the profession and in personal of enjoying reading for its own sake.